



NOAA's National Ocean Service

## ROUNDTABLES

## CONSERVATION

**N**OAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) is mandated to conserve the nation's valuable marine resources. To accomplish this broad mission, NOS supports a number of activities, including science for conservation solutions; observations and assessments to track ecosystem conditions; the development and evaluation of marine protected areas; capacity building among state, territorial, and international partners; education and outreach; and collaborative on-the-ground conservation projects.

### Coral Reef Conservation

NOS conducts a wide range of activities to manage and conserve coral reef ecosystems. The Office of Response and Restoration serves as the lead for NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), which supports effective management and sound science to preserve, sustain and restore coral reefs. The program collaborates with government, private, academic and other nongovernmental partners to prevent the loss and degradation of these ecosystems.

NOS plays an essential role in comprehensive coral reef mapping and national efforts to build an integrated coral reef monitoring system. NOS also coordinates several grants programs to support coral reef management, monitoring, and research.

NOS (representing NOAA) serves as the co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, which includes the heads of 11 federal agencies and the governors of seven states, territories, and commonwealths. NOS is leading the task force in the development of a national strategy for coral reef conservation and management.

NOS recently launched the new Coral Management Assistantship Program to help U.S. states and territories manage and conserve coral reefs. The program placed coral management assistants on two-year assignments with management agencies in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Hawaii, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The assistants work on reef-related issues such as overuse, education and outreach, and land-based pollution.

In 2003, the CRCP supported 26 on-the-ground projects through the Coral Reef Conservation Fund. This partnership between NOAA and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provides matching grants to build public-private partnerships for the conservation of coral reefs. In 2003, the fund leveraged \$0.89 million in NOAA funds with \$1.7 million in nonfederal matching funds for a total of \$2.59 million.

### A National Network of Marine Protected Areas

The National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Center, headquartered in NOS, is a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Interior to implement Executive Order (EO) 13158 on MPAs. The MPA Center is planning, managing, and evaluating a system of U.S. MPAs. A major task is the development of an inventory of marine managed areas. The inventory will be used to analyze the status of protected areas and to evaluate sites for future placement in the system of MPAs, which will enhance federal conservation efforts.



# N O S

W o r k i n g f o r A m e r i c a ' s C o a s t s

## **MPA Stewardship**

The MPA Center published a research strategy that identifies six priority themes to address social science needs in the planning, management, and evaluation of MPAs. The themes are (1) governance, institutions, and processes; (2) use patterns; (3) attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs; (4) the economics of MPAs; (5) communities; and (6) submerged cultural resources. A series of regional social science workshops is in progress. The MPA Center is also developing a research strategy for natural sciences.

The MPA Center's March 2002 MPA Needs Assessment includes recommendations for clarifying MPA-related policies and legal issues, providing MPA-related science and technology, and reaching out to communities interested in MPAs. A recently completed MPA technology needs assessment identified three priority focus areas: (1) marine habitats, (2) enforcement and boundaries, and (3) monitoring of the marine environment. The assessments help to guide the MPA Center, the NOAA Coastal Services Center in Charleston, SC, and other partners as they design products and services to support MPAs.

## **National Marine Sanctuary Program**

National Marine Sanctuaries are areas of national ecological, cultural, and/or recreational significance and include rocky reefs, kelp forests, whale migration corridors, deep-sea canyons, and underwater archaeological sites. The primary objective of a sanctuary is to protect an area's natural and cultural features while allowing people to use and enjoy them. The National Marine Sanctuary Program manages 13 sanctuaries, encompassing more than 18,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters, from Washington State to the Florida Keys and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The sanctuaries conduct scientific research, monitoring, explorations, educational programs, and outreach to increase public understanding of America's ocean and Great Lakes treasures.

## **Coastal Zone Management Program**

Coastal states manage activities that affect coastal and ocean resources through a partnership with NOS established by the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972. State coastal management programs are based primarily on state-level policies backed by federal guidelines. The state-federal coordination established under the CZMA ensures that ocean-based economic activities are conducted in ways that minimize impacts to coastal resources.

## **Discussion Questions**

- *What is the best way to ensure public participation in national decision-making related to NOS conservation efforts?*
- *Which scientific tools are needed to better understand and implement conservation efforts?*
- *How can NOS improve its efforts to conserve and manage coral reefs and other marine ecosystems?*
- *Who else is a potential NOS partner in coral reef conservation?*
- *How can NOS improve information exchange and access on coral reef issues?*